

NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



AS I SEE IT

Wake County CIS Learning Centers Brighten Futures

September 8, 2009

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of visiting the Communities in Schools (CIS) of Wake County's Capitol Park Learning Center in downtown Raleigh. Before my visit, I knew that CIS Learning Centers meet a critical community need by providing after-school tutoring and mentoring to hundreds of local students. After touring the Capitol Park facility and talking with staff, I was even more impressed by the real and significant differences this small team of dedicated people make every day in the lives of the students they serve.

Recently, I was able to tour another great CIS of Wake County facility and gain first-hand experience with the after-school program at the Heritage Park Learning Center. As soon as I arrived, I was greeted by an eager group of bright and enthusiastic students. I also helped Heritage Park staff kick off their new "Ready to Read" literacy program during my visit. As a part of this program, staff conduct after-school lessons for kindergartners and first graders to help them improve language skills including letter and sound recognition, reading, writing and spelling. The goal of the program is to get students reading at or above grade level by the end of the school year. But Heritage Park is not just about tutoring. As I read and talked with these students, I was reminded how important it is that every child and teen has a place to go outside of school where they feel encouraged and supported. The Heritage Park Learning Center is clearly one of those places.

In larger schools systems like Wake County's, an ever-increasing number of students can lead to larger schools and full classrooms. While they accomplish much, our teachers and school leaders cannot do everything on their own. That is why the State Board of Education and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction recognize that Communities in Schools of Wake County is one of many key partners in our efforts to make sure every student reaches his or her full potential. The encouragement and motivation CIS of Wake County staff members provide to young people is critical to their future success. Many of these students have never considered college before, but CIS staff members and volunteers help to show them that a college degree can be within their reach.

While we cannot assign a value to this type of service, CIS tutors and mentors can and should take pride in the many futures they make brighter. Now I am even more excited about continuing to visit these learning centers throughout the rest of the school year. And I look forward to seeing more inspiring stories as a result of the work being done by Communities in Schools of Wake County.

Bill Harrison, Chairman
State Board of Education